

Treatment and Prevention of Childhood Earaches

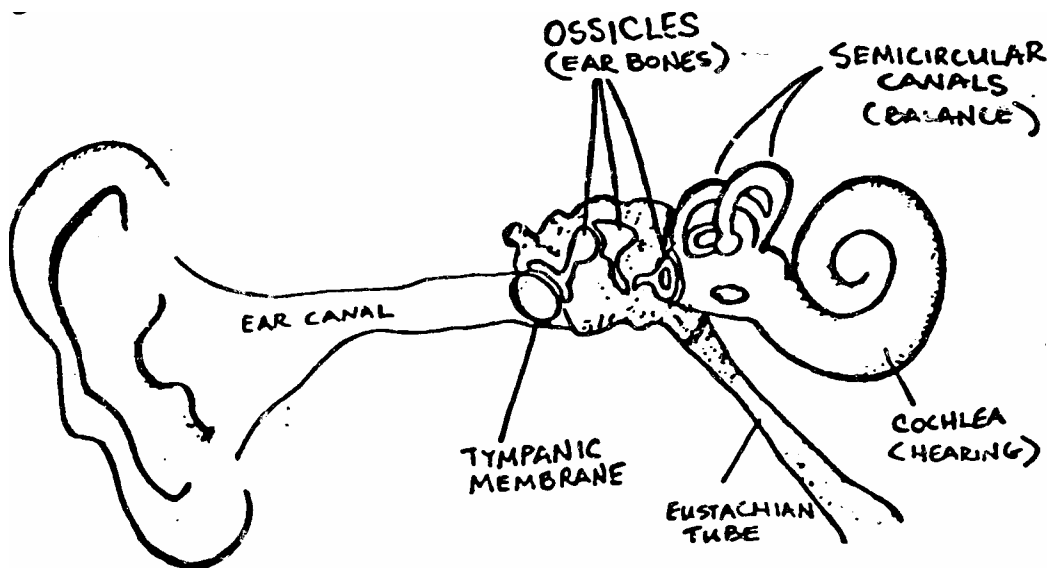
Otitis media, or inflammation of the middle ear, is the most common problem leading to earaches in infants and young children. By the age of 3, more than 2/3 of children have had at least one episode of otitis media, with 1/3 having had more than one episode. The goal of naturopathic care is to safely and quickly remove the cause of inflammation and to prevent future problems by building a strong immune system.

What Causes Otitis Media?

Otitis media is more common in the winter when bacteria and viruses are out in full force and our natural resistance tends to be lowered by less exercise, fresh air and fresh foods, along with being more exposed to cold and wet weather. Holiday indulgences of sweets are sometimes the last push into ..."my ea' hurts"...an earache.

The underlying problem is an immune system weakened by diet, stress, food allergy or inadequate early treatment of a minor cold or infection. Often cold, tonsillitis, pneumonia, measles or mumps affects the eustachian tubes (*see below diagram*) which in infants and young children are shorter and more horizontal than in older children and adults. The tube is easily blocked and can't drain to the back of the throat, so mucous builds up in the middle ear. This sets up a warm moist home for rapid growth of organisms... too rapid for a weakened immune system to handle.

If otitis media is a chronic problem, allergies are the #1 suspect. Allergies to common foods and/or inhalants are found in almost all (85-90%) people with recurring otitis media. Fortunately, natural treatments have excellent long term success by eliminating the cause of the problem and strengthening the immune system.



How to Detect Otitis Media

At any age... tugging at ear, loss of hearing, ear pain, runny or stuffed nose, cough

Under age 2... persistent crying, irritability, difficulty sleeping, fever

Over age 2... complaint of earache, fullness in ears

Should your child be examined by a physician?

If your child is feverish and irritable, with or without ear pain, it's a good idea to make an appointment with your physician. Diagnosis of otitis media is made by looking at the ear canal and tympanic membrane with an otoscope as well as observing and asking questions about changes in behaviour.

Antibiotics... the overkill treatment of choice

The problem with antibiotics is that they often have side effects (abdominal discomfort, stomach pain and toxicity to the kidneys) and they don't build the immune system.

Antibiotics aren't picky, they also kill helpful bacteria in the intestines, leaving fertile ground for the overgrowth of harmful yeast such as Candida. People not receiving antibiotics have less frequent recurrence of otitis media than people who receive antibiotics! The current belief is that antibiotics remove the opportunity for the immune system to develop itself in fighting current and future infections.

Treatment and Prevention

This information is offered to complement rather than replace proper diagnosis and treatment by your naturopathic physician. The following treatments are all easy to do and can be administered at home with things most of us have on hand. While some of these treatments offer long term prevention, others will help parents and children "get through the night", as earaches often occur late in the evening or during the night.

Nutrition

You can help keep your child healthy by feeding them lots of real, live foods. The vitamins and minerals in whole foods build a strong immune system to fight infection. Offering a variety of raw or lightly steamed vegetables, especially onions, garlic, raw carrots or carrot juice, will reduce mucus build-up in the middle ear. During an earache, avoiding dairy products, refined foods and sweets will reward your child with a speedier recovery and heightened happiness.

3 day diet for Ruby-Pink Cheeks:

Breakfast:	citrus fruit
Mid-morning	fresh carrot juice
Lunch	plate of steamed onions and other vegetables
Mid-afternoon	vegetable broth or carrot juice
Supper	repeat lunch
Evening	repeat mid-afternoon